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Trade union membership

Trade union membership by employment and socio-demographic characteristics such as full-time/part-time, age, industry, occupation, education, earnings

Reference period August 2020

Released 11/12/2020

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Key statistics

- 14% of employees (1.4 million) were trade union members.
- Since 1992, the proportion of employees who were trade union members has fallen from 40% to 14%.
- The Education and Training industry (31%) and the Professionals occupation (21%) had the highest trade union membership.

Prior to August 2020, information on trade union membership was published in [Characteristics of Employment \(/statistics/labour/earnings-and-work-hours/characteristics-employment-australia/aug-2019\)](/statistics/labour/earnings-and-work-hours/characteristics-employment-australia/aug-2019).

From August 2020, statistics from the Characteristics of Employment survey are now published in three topic-based releases - this Trade union membership release, as well as:

- [Employee earnings \(/statistics/labour/earnings-and-work-hours/employee-earnings/aug-2020\)](/statistics/labour/earnings-and-work-hours/employee-earnings/aug-2020)
- [Working arrangements \(/statistics/labour/earnings-and-work-hours/working-arrangements/aug-2020\)](/statistics/labour/earnings-and-work-hours/working-arrangements/aug-2020).

Employee earnings, working arrangements and trade union membership data from the Characteristics of employment survey for 2014 to 2020 will be available in [TableBuilder \(https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/6333.0.00.001Main+Features1August%202019\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/6333.0.00.001Main+Features1August%202019) from 16 December 2020.

TableBuilder enables the creation of customised tables and graphs.

Trade union members

There were 1.5 million trade union members in August 2020. 12.3% of part-time employees were trade union members compared to 15.3% who worked in full-time jobs.

Trade union membership

| | Full-time (%) | Part-time (%) | Total (%) |
|------|---------------|---------------|-----------|
| 1986 | 47.3 | 40.2 | 45.6 |
| 1992 | 44.3 | 25.2 | 39.6 |
| 1998 | 31.2 | 20.2 | 28.1 |
| 2004 | 27.0 | 17.3 | 24.1 |
| 2010 | 21.5 | 15.1 | 19.5 |
| 2016 | 17.2 | 12.3 | 15.6 |
| 2018 | 16.0 | 11.8 | 14.6 |
| 2020 | 15.3 | 12.3 | 14.3 |

Trade union membership tends to increase with age. In August 2020 only 5% of employees aged 15-19 years and 6% aged 20-24 were trade union members. This increased to 23% for

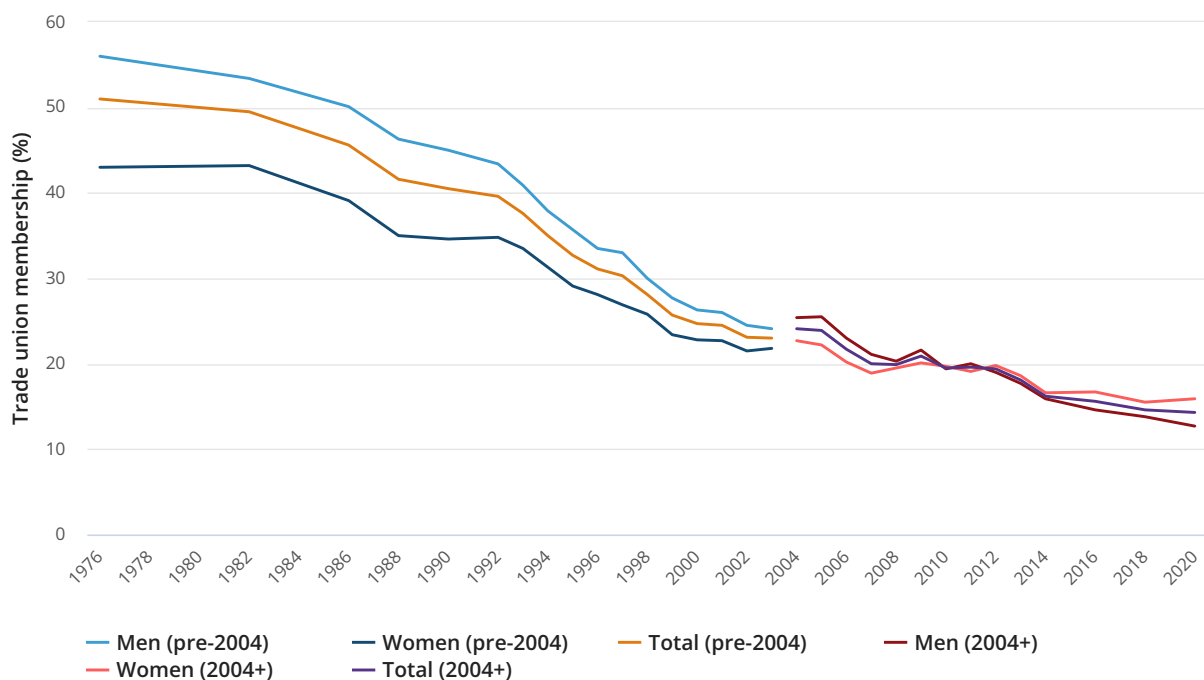
employees aged 55-59 and 25% for employees aged 60-64.

Trade union membership over time

Of the 10.4 million employees in August 2020, 14.3% were a member of a trade union in their main job. This is a decrease from the 14.6% recorded in August 2018.

Trade union membership has generally declined since 1992. From 1992 to 2020, the proportion of employees who were trade union members has fallen from 40% to 14% (from 43% to 13% for men and 35% to 16% for women).

Trade union membership by sex



Sources: 1. [Trade Union Members, Australia](https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/6325.0) (<https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/6325.0>) (1976-1996) 2. [Employee Earnings, Benefits and Trade Union Membership, Australia](https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/allprimarymainfeatures/3AC58BDF664E8ED5CA256FCB00735B35?opendocument) (<https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/allprimarymainfeatures/3AC58BDF664E8ED5CA256FCB00735B35?opendocument>) (1997-2003), 3. [Characteristics of Employment, Australia](https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/earnings-and-work-hours/characteristics-employment-australia/latest-release) (<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/earnings-and-work-hours/characteristics-employment-australia/latest-release>) (2004-2020)

Notes: 1. pre-2004 series: includes Owner Managers of Incorporated Enterprises (OMIEs), 2. 2004+ series: excludes OMIEs, 3. The ABS plans to produce historically comparable estimates for the pre-2004 period, excluding OMIEs, in the future.

Trade union membership history

The majority of trade union members held membership for 5 years or more.

Women made up a greater proportion of trade union membership (55%) than men (45%).

Duration of trade union membership

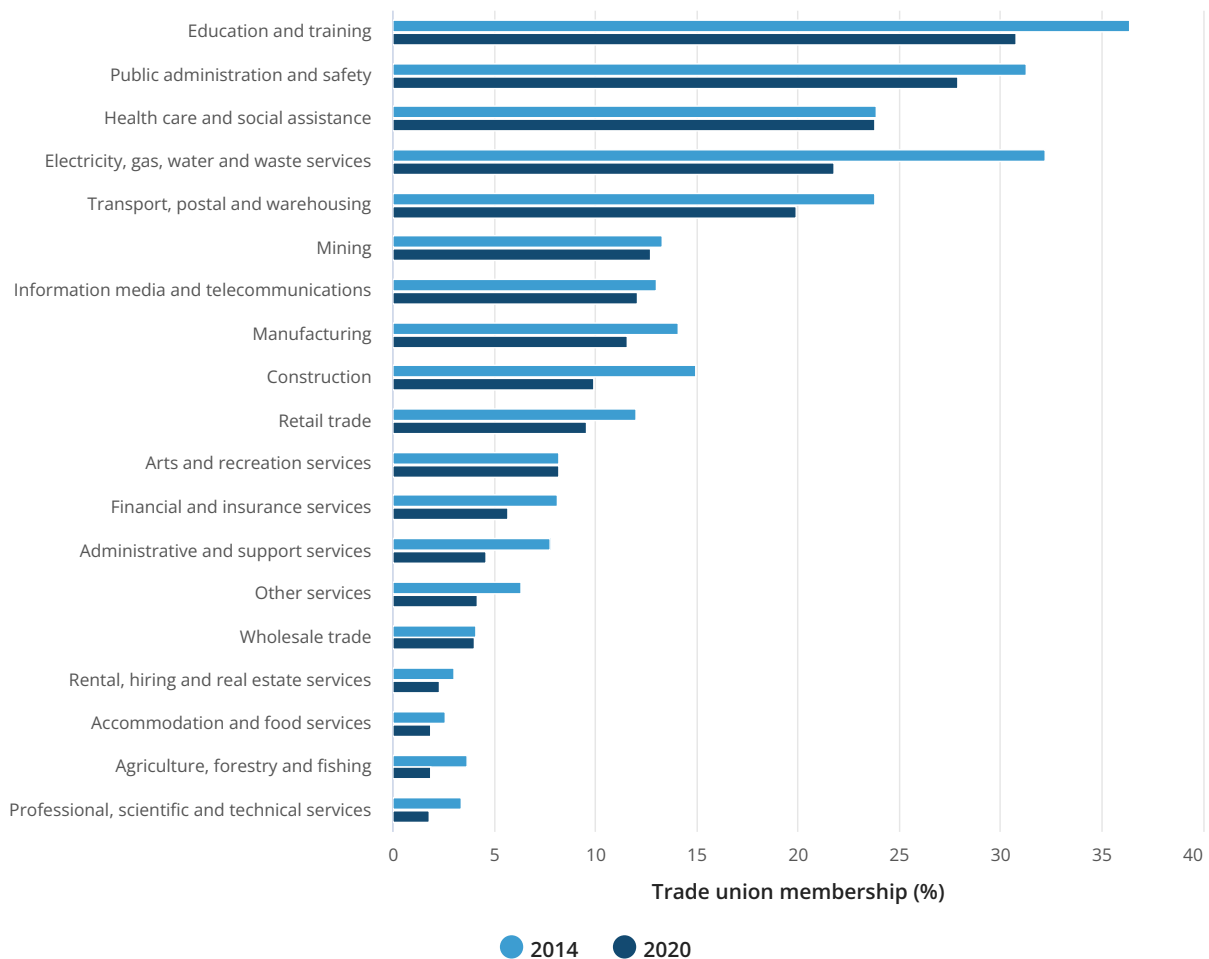
| | Fewer than 5 years ('000) | 5 years or more ('000) | Total ('000) |
|-------|---------------------------|------------------------|--------------|
| Men | 198.6 | 470.2 | 668.8 |
| Women | 266.9 | 556.5 | 823.4 |
| Total | 465.5 | 1,026.8 | 1,492.3 |

Industry

The industries with the highest proportion of employees who were trade union members were:

- Education and training (31%)
- Public administration and safety (28%)
- Health care and social assistance (24%).

Trade union membership, by industry



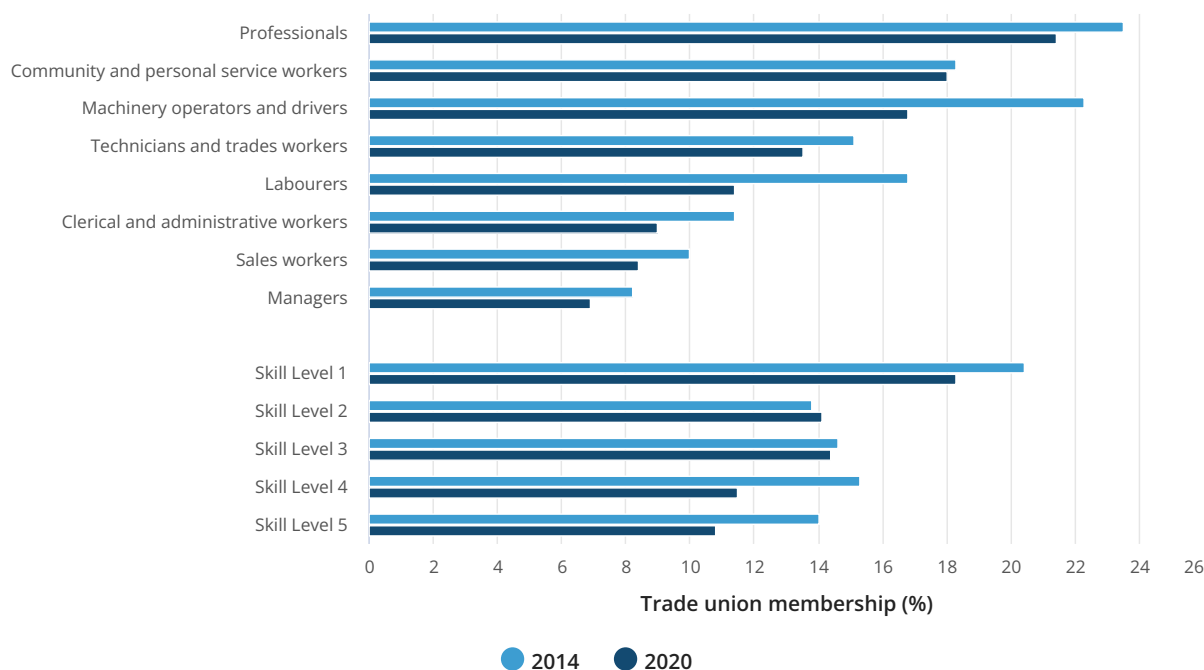
1. For more information on Industries, refer to [Australian and New Zealand Standard Industrial Classification \(ANZSIC\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/1292.0) (<https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/1292.0>).

Occupation

The occupations which recorded the highest proportion of employees who were Trade Union members were:

- Professionals (21%)
- Community and Personal Service Workers (18%)
- Machinery operators and drivers (17%).

Trade union membership, by occupation and skill level

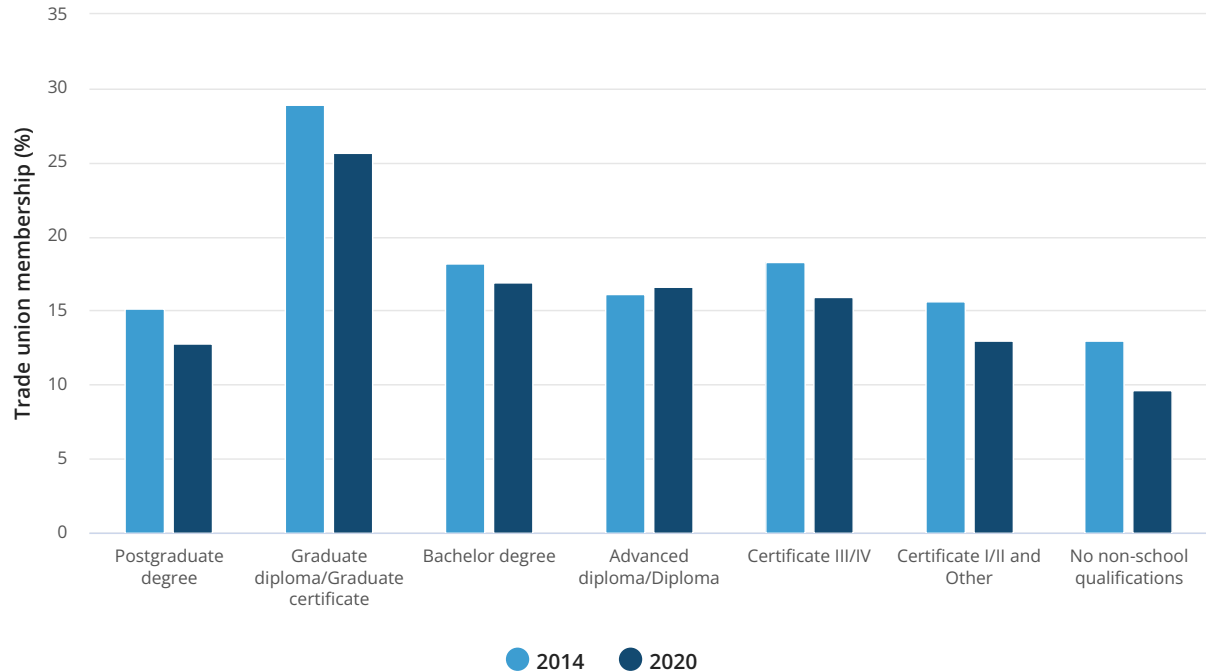


1. Data is coded to ANZSCO ver 1.2. For more information on Occupations and Skill level, refer to [ANZSCO - Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations \(https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/1220.0Chapter32013,%20Version%201.3\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/1220.0Chapter32013,%20Version%201.3)

Educational attainment

Trade union membership was considerably more prevalent for employed people with a Graduate Diploma or Graduate certificate (26%), than for other qualifications. Trade union membership was lowest amongst those without non-school qualifications (10%). Trade union membership was slightly higher for people with a Postgraduate degree (13%) or a Bachelor degree (17%).

Trade union membership, by educational attainment

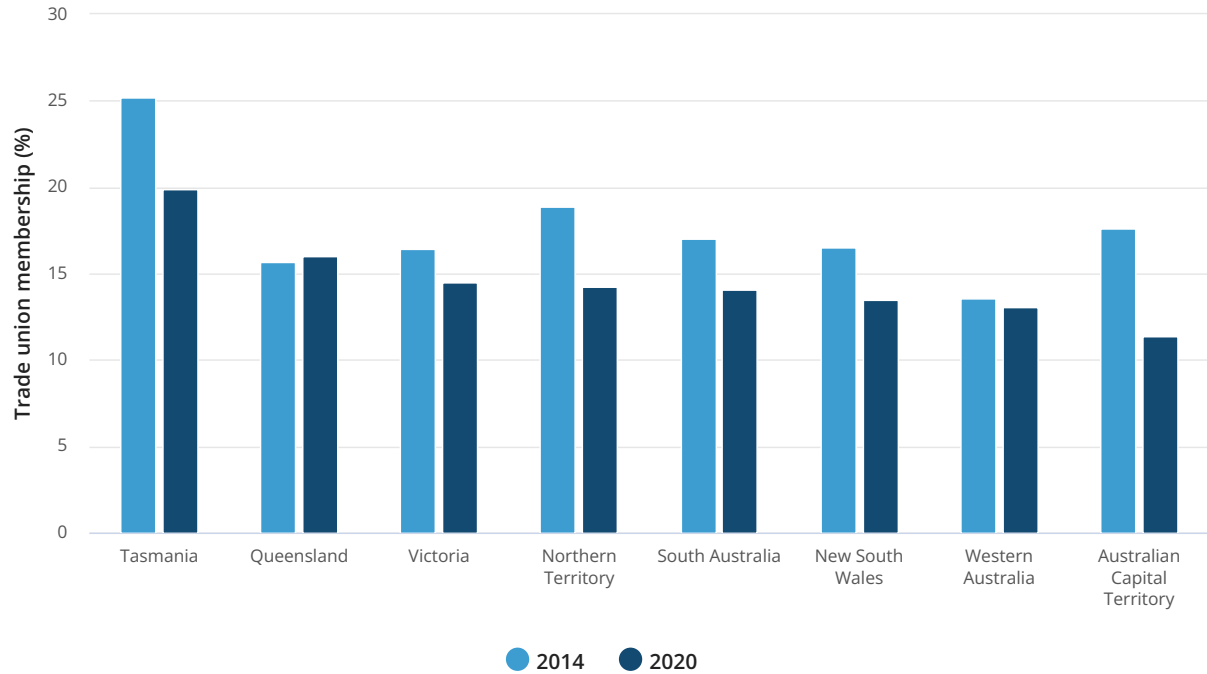


1. For more information on educational attainment, refer to [Australian Standard Classification of Education \(ASCED\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/1272.0) (<https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/1272.0>).

State and territory

Tasmania had the highest proportion (20%) of employees who were trade union members, while Western Australia and the ACT had the lowest (13% and 11% respectively).

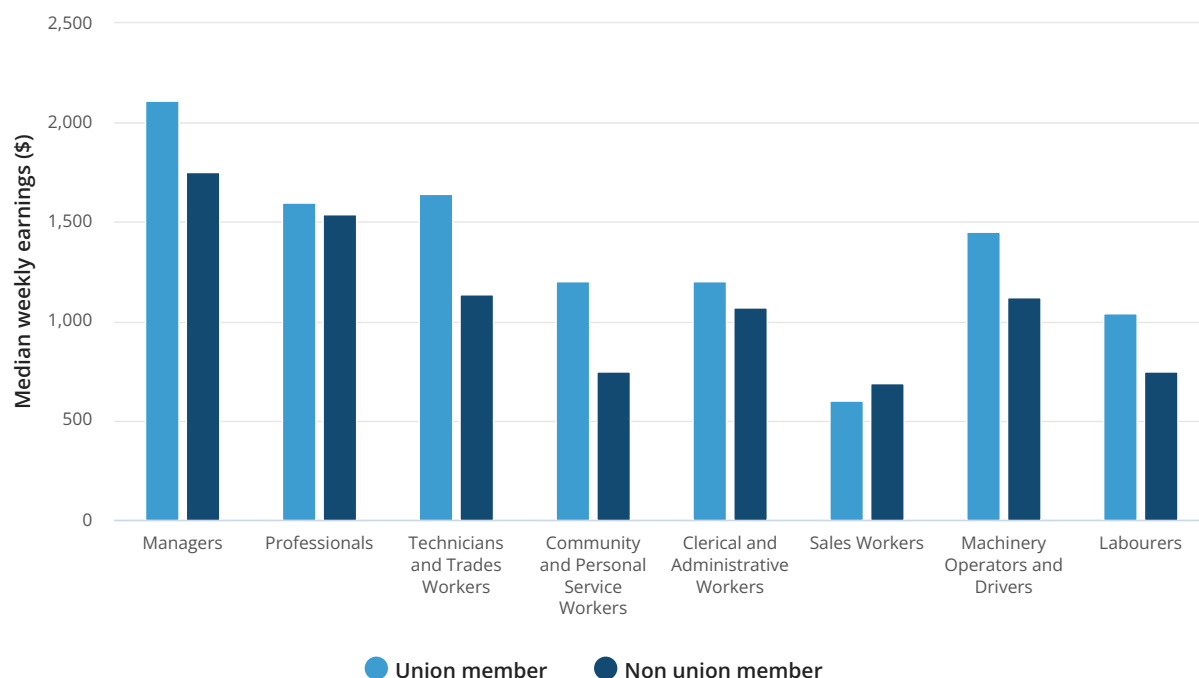
Trade union membership, by state and territory



Earnings

The median weekly earnings for employees who were trade union members in their main job were \$1,450 per week, compared with \$1,100 for employees who were not a trade union member.

Median weekly earnings, by union membership in main job



Job characteristics

Of the employees who were trade union members only 8% were casual employees (employees without leave entitlements).

| | Trade union member in main job ('000) | Not a trade union member ('000) | Total employees ('000) |
|--|--|------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Without paid leave entitlements | 91.0 | 1,953.2 | 2,281.6 |
| Less than 12 months in current job | 95.7 | 1,631.8 | 1,912.3 |
| Not guaranteed a minimum number of weekly hours | 145.1 | 1,798.7 | 2,128.7 |

Data downloads

Table 1d - Median Earnings by full-time or part-time, state and trade union members in main job

[!\[\]\(50ba758255c5d7cec2761495a31c7c80_img.jpg\) Download XLS](#)

[266.5 KB]

Table 3 - Distribution of earnings for employees by industry

[!\[\]\(99f58673407353e96a019fbca558fd72_img.jpg\) Download XLS](#)

[308 KB]

Table 4 - Distribution of earnings for employees by occupation and skill level

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[185 KB]

Table 5 - Distribution of earnings for employees by educational qualification

[!\[\]\(6059a5aa8b4ca7bb793408023d6c6e42_img.jpg\) Download XLS](#)

[172.5 KB]

Table 12 - Median Earning for employees by duration (length) of current trade union membership

[!\[\]\(9c2e8d1b5bd77cb5c9f83b7a9cff79fd_img.jpg\) Download XLS](#)

[186.5 KB]

Table 14 - Median earnings for employees by trade union membership

[!\[\]\(f1c5da15572e3e09d343161be98f508d_img.jpg\) Download XLS](#)

[222 KB]

All 2020 data cubes

[!\[\]\(83bbbd261710c59db0214aa27b2edc0d_img.jpg\) Download ZIP](#)

[335.62 KB]

Historical data: Table 12 - Median earnings for employees by duration (length) of current trade union membership

[!\[\]\(a73c1962d20a39dd8fd6a060ae69693f_img.jpg\) Download ZIP](#)

[114.72 KB]

Historical data: Table 3 - Distribution of earnings for employees by industry

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[462.9 KB]

Historical data: Table 4 - Distribution of earnings for employees by occupation and skill level

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[278.88 KB]

Historical data: Table 5 - Distribution of earnings for employees by educational qualification

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[251.72 KB]

Previous catalogue number

- This release uses ABS catalogue number 6335.0*.
- Data from this release was previously published in [Characteristics of Employment \(https://author.absweb.aws.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/earnings-and-work-hours/characteristics-employment-australia/aug-2019\)](https://author.absweb.aws.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/earnings-and-work-hours/characteristics-employment-australia/aug-2019) (catalogue number 6333.0**).

Prior to 2014, trade union membership statistics were published in [Employee Earnings, Benefits and Trade Union Membership, Australia \(https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/6310.0\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/6310.0) (catalogue number 6310.0).

Prior to 1999, trade union membership statistics were published in [Trade Union Members, Australia \(https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/6325.0\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/6325.0) (catalogue number 6325.0).

*Note: Catalogue number 6336.0 was previously used [Working Conditions, Australia \(https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/6335.0\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/6335.0), Feb to May 1979.

**Note: Catalogue number 6333.0 was previously used for [Working Conditions, Australia \(Preliminary\) \(https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/6335.0Feb-May%201979?OpenDocument\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/6335.0Feb-May%201979?OpenDocument), Feb to May 1979.

Methodology

[Characteristics of Employment, Australia methodology, August 2020](#)